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## Film-based Creative Arts Enquiry: Qualitative Researchers as Auteurs

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### Abstract:

**Purpose:** Inspired by an exciting revival of interest in the working methods and processes of the creative arts we make use of the auteur approach to film production to further develop knowledge about sensuous methodologies in qualitative research.

**Design/methodology/approach:** An exegesis of our particular experiences in producing and disseminating a short documentary film is used to construct a framework from which to analyse affective modes of engagement within the parameters of qualitative research.

**Findings:** Qualitative researchers are characterised as creative artists who bring their precise aesthetic choice to bear on an audience through a mix of technical competence, distinguishable personality and interior meaning.

**Practical implications:** One way for qualitative research to have affective impact is to use the working methods and procedures of the creative arts.

**Social implications:** A research culture is required where risk is permissible and engagement with the creative arts is given greater recognition in future qualitative projects.

**Originality/value:** As a mode of creative arts enquiry filmmaking can allow a degree of the emotional meaning and feeling within a study to come through into the analysis and the viewer's/reader's affective experience. This is often difficult to come by in more scientifically driven research approaches.

**Keywords:** auteur theory; creative arts enquiry; documentary film; lines of flight; research, qualitative; visual methods

**Article Classification:** Research paper

## Introduction

Have you ever wondered why, despite the realisation that the social world is not only shaped by rational processes, it also involves subjectivity, discursive formations, emotions, passions, aesthetic activities, and so forth, there is relatively little focus on the affective domain, on how people express themselves and on how they individually and collectively experience their daily lives? We live today in a world of affect, where expertise and ‘information’ are free for the asking and always available on the global IT platform (Zuboff, 1988), where ‘financialization’ has become a significant and troubling feature (Martin, 2002) and where the deluge of cultural images on myriad satellite TV channels consumes us in a ‘Disneyesque’ dream-world (Ritzer, 2005). All of these aspects make claims on our affections and yet this interest has often been traced without any consideration of, or connection to, broader elements of affect.

In qualitative research there are always trade-offs among precision, ability to generalize and vividness. Historically, there has been heavy emphasis placed by positivist and post positivist logics on the methods of natural science research (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Over the past two decades, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in the importance of affect, the senses and embodied experience. This trend has produced a variety of experimental and sensuous methodologies as sources for enquiry and representation (Warren, 2008). Extant research has drawn from the spheres of cultural investigation and the creative arts (Barrett and Bolt, 2010; Barone and Eisner, 2012; Strangleman and Warren, 2008), including oral (Linstead, 2006), audio-visual (Barone, 2003; Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004; Caldwell and Henry, 2010; Denzin, 1991; Höpfl and Letiche, 2002) and printed forms (Linstead, 2006, 2007), to communicate better the complexity, connectedness and intensity of living experience. At this point, however, knowledge about sensuous methodologies needs to be developed further.

Our contention is that this development has probably gone furthest in film. While prior articles add to a stock of academic literature on film-based research, most authors, certainly in our own discipline, tend to draw on theory to describe ‘film’s unique qualities as a communication medium’ (Champoux, 1999, p. 206). The use of film as a resource has therefore been primarily as a supplementary material (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2004; Tyler et al., 2009) rather than as a means to create new ways of thinking and feeling. This suggests limits to our understanding and development of what film enables us to experience and of our attempts to put aesthetic engagement into practice (Sinnerbrink, 2011). To elaborate this claim we combine critical themes from the so-called auteur approach to film analysis (Truffaut, 1976) with a self-reflexive exegesis of our particular experiences in producing and disseminating a short, award winning documentary *Lines of Flight* (Brown and Wood, 2009). Our aim is to construct a framework from which to analyse the interconnection between filmmaking, as a mode of aesthetic engagement, and the system of domination that shapes the parameters of qualitative research. A key insight that emerges from this analysis is that the practice of filmmaking can be a highly affective form of qualitative research in itself, with its own distinctive mode of communicating thoughts and feelings together.

Implicit in the auteur approach is a certain concept of the role of the director, as the person responsible for the creation of the stories, scenarios and dialogues on the screen (Flynn, 1971). A general feature is that film can be a means for self-expression by an individual artist who uses sounds and images to communicate ideas and arouse appropriate emotions in the viewer (Flynn, 1971). Likewise the production of *Lines of Flight* can be approached as an expression of our own personalities, feelings and ideas. As an artwork *Lines of Flight* is part micro-ethnography of free solo rock climbing, part visual geography of the Pennines in the north of England, part Deleuzian philosophy and part socio-historical critique of working class oppression and resistance. We use the film to evoke, elicit and engage

viewers in aesthetic experiences they have not lived through as if they had actually been lived (Bachelard, 1994; Deleuze, 1992). By foregrounding sounds and images in affective, dynamic and aesthetic terms, we invite viewers to reflect on their own personalities, feelings and ideas. Moreover, as researchers, we extend this capacity to reflect on one's self to our own 'materialising practices' (Barrett, 2010, p. 5) of production. By focusing attention on the particularity of our experiences we make a practical contribution to the literature on sensuous methodologies. At the same time we provide an intimate account that retains a high degree of self-reflexion (Barrett, 2010). It is this capacity for both affective and self-reflective modes of thought that we believe comprises the potential of our creative approach for further application in the qualitative research field.

The rest of this article is organised as follows. We begin by reviewing the documentary status of film and then introduce the auteur approach to film production and outline a framework used to characterise film practice. Next we share some insights from our first-hand experiences of researching and crafting *Lines of Flight* in terms of the auteur approach. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on the potential impact of film-based approaches on the qualitative research discipline.

### **Art, Science and Documentary Film**

Documentary and its source word 'document' (derived from the Latin documentum: a lesson) speaks of something written or inscribed and carries with it the connotation of evidence or information (Winston, 1995). This sense of document as truthful testimony incorporated the photograph, which came of age in the period of nascent industrialisation and was regarded as the most 'realistic' method of documentation (Sontag, 1977).

From its inception, the camera was seen as a device that captured all, as showing something occurring nominally 'out there'. Nonetheless, as Barthes (1977, p. 19) convincingly argues, the purely denotative status of the photograph, its 'objectivity' as an observational statement about the world, 'has every chance of being mythical'. Barthes (1977) asks what it is that the photograph transmits, the literal 'reality' or else some 'treatment' (that is to say a code) of the image of reality. He concludes that the photographic message actually is heavily connoted. The photographic image has been chosen, worked on, composed, constructed and treated, according to various norms. The act of photographing is much more than dispassionate observation (Sontag, 1977) rather using a camera is a form of subjective participation or intervention in the world. In other words, the apparently truthful view of reality by the photograph is at best only a portion of the world that happened to occur in front of the photographer and which he or she chose to communicate. The intractable presence of the photographed image is therefore an on-going source of tension, particularly in scholarly studies of non-fiction film, which, like photography, attempts to straddle a scientific approach and an artistic one.

Documentary methods fall neatly either side of the presumed opposition between logical-deductive approaches to knowledge and socio-cultural and embodied ways of knowing. That is, the point of departure that continues today between documentary truthfulness and the subjectivity of lived experience. The documentary film, like the photographic camera, is seen as an observational instrument and remains very close to modern science. Great stress is placed on a traditional 'realist' or 'naturalist' description, which in turn becomes the basis of judgments about an objective social or material world: something that all of us would necessarily perceive the same way. A result is the strong claim, one that has only recently been expanded on (see, for example, Saunders, 2007), of facts recorded mechanically and automatically on film.

Some documentary filmmakers operate according to an alternative aesthetic mode, however, one supported by an epistemology that calls into question the traditional

documentary genre as truthful testimony and invites the viewer to participate in a rather different kind of experience. Claims of an 'objective' reality, on which the filmmaker seeks to report, might also depend on a collaborative effort between the camera, the subject and the filmmaker, which is often deeply ingrained and always culturally produced (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2005). The filmmaker does not observe with apparent dispassion but rather is affected by the portion of the world he or she encounters. The camera is a tool that provokes and produces perceptions, emotions and actions in the world. On this view, documentary film construction moves away altogether from the established modes of factual communication, what the pioneering documentarian and critic, John Grierson, called the lacklustre or 'shapeless reproduction' of a 'literal reality', and toward 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Winston, 1995, pp. 11-19). This is something Deleuze calls the 'fabulative function', which is neither fictional nor factual but 'combines historical experiences in the form of a new collectivity' (Bogue, 2003, p. 152).

As a result of this bifurcation, particularly in France, the pseudo-scientific method gave way to a new artistic attitude in documentary filmmaking. Revolutionary auteurs such as Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, Michael Snow and others, began to see the point of communication between the camera, the observer, the observed, the screen and the audience, as a kind of reflexive 'ethnofiction ... a form of participatory ethnography, a collaborative effort to create the truth of a lived cultural experience' (Bogue, 2003, p. 152). Their 'cinéma vérité' approach, from the French: literally truth cinema, but which has nothing whatsoever to do with absolute truth, saw filmmaking as an art of encounter, one in which an interweaving narrative is inevitably created between the subject or situation being filmed and the filmmaker. Rouch and Morin considered what went on in front of the camera to be less important than the fact that the camera was there at all. By choosing to manipulate their material using discussion, interview and improvisation, undercutting action on the screen with activity behind the camera, they were interested to explore the formal and thematic consciousness flitting back and forth between filmmaker and subject in an unsettling, perpetual exchange.

The suggestion that a film does more than straightforwardly transmit literal reality is reinforced by the inclusion of evidence of the process of construction. Rouch and Morin select interpret and arrange the views and attitudes of their subjects in *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer), while interviewees respond to open questioning from behind the camera. It is this internal relation of on/off camera interaction that embodies a mobile reality rather than simply representing a fixed state of affairs. Likewise, in Michael Snow's *The Central Region*, a single, specially constructed camera is rotated in a continuous sequence through all the points along both a longitudinal and latitudinal sphere. Snow's camera scans in all planes and determines characters and objects along both the vertical and horizontal axis. By incorporating in a single constant flow of motion certain images of all regions, including footage of the apparatus upon which the camera is mounted, Snow views the separate parts of the image usually demarcated by the camera frame as components of a single composition. His approach effectively unites the detached parts and hence disturbs our perceptual habits and expectations, which force an arbitrarily divisible view of things.

From the point of view of images, these dynamic movements and spaces do not already exist, they have to be created. An analysis of films of this type calls forth new resources and new theories that hold to a sense of the prototypical auteur, or author of the cinema (Truffaut, 1976). Notable auteurs like Rouch and Morin and Snow worked with what they had, but each had his own way of conceiving and using not just the sights that occurred in the presence of a camera, but also the sounds, lights and movements that contributed to the filmic affect. The director's artistic and creative treatment of these parameters resembles what Thrift (2007, p. 15, original emphasis) calls an 'ethic of craftsmanship, a means of

composition and channelling which involves bringing together discipline and concentration, understanding and inspiration, in order to bring out potential’.

### **The Auteur Policy**

In an article written in 1954, François Truffaut (1976, p. S228) makes it clear that directors ‘are and wish to be responsible for the scenarios and dialogues they illustrate’ rather than being concerned merely with the mechanical reproduction of reality on film. He provocatively points out how auteurs often invent the stories they put on the screen and, in the last instance, exercise control over the ‘mise-en-scène’: the dense network of off screen connections between film and audience in the here and the now, and ‘text’. The notion of text here not only includes written words but also talk, social practices and all the physical and symbolic artefacts that a filmmaker intends and a viewer experiences (Boje, 2001).

Truffaut’s original article was developed subsequently by film critics into the so-called ‘auteur policy’ or ‘politique des auteurs’ (Hess, 1974). His manifesto, and the controversy surrounding it, was used to characterise film criticism and theory in the late 1950s and early 1960s (see, for example, Kael, 1963; Sarris, 1962; 1963). Auteur Critics focused attention on film directors they thought had creative vision. They saw their chosen ‘auteurs’ as authors or artists whose creative voice had a distinct influence on all aspects of the production of a film, including pre-production planning, directing and post production editing. Hitchcock was often held up as the ‘touchstone of touchstones’ (Sarris, 1974, p. 63) and a contemporary list of auteurs might add the likes of Allen, Burton, Campion, Gilliam, Herzog, Lynch, Scorsese, Tarrantino and von Trier, to the perennial admiration for Besson, Cocteau, Eisenstein, Ford, Lang, Renoir, Welles and Zinnermann.

Sarris (1962) sets out three premises or criteria of judgment to distinguish admired directors. These include: ‘technical competence’ or the extent to which the director ‘knows’ what visual devices will have a desired effect on the audience; ‘distinguishable personality’ including the signature visual devices and trademark techniques and themes that reappear in the director’s work; as well as the ‘interior meaning’ of that work, or the ‘tension’ between the director’s personal sensibility and the content of what he or she produces in the face of the important constraints inevitably placed upon him or her. These criteria were employed by aspiring directors as a new language to attack the established system (Stam, 2000).

### **On a Line of Flight**

A line of flight is a concept developed by the contemporary French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the Marxist psychoanalyst Felix Guattari in their successive works on schizophrenia and capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; 1987). They describe lines of flight as movements of creativity or practical acts that are set against or exceed the authority structures of capitalism. These lines open up flows that ‘flee’, ‘slip away’ and ‘leak’ out from the systems of power that seek to channel and block them (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). It is precisely this countercultural desire to elude or escape the organisation of political, social and cultural codes that we appeal to in our short film.

In this pursuit we set the decoded flows of free solo rock climbing on the rural hills in the Pennine region of northern England against characteristic features of late capitalism – the shapes, forms, routines and dynamics of the workplace, changing lifestyles and the growing influence of the mass media – in the neighbouring (post) industrial towns and cities. In *Lines of Flight* we explore the strong connections between the people and landscape of the Pennines region of northern England – a low rising mountain range, generally known as the ‘backbone of England’, which covers much of the counties of Derbyshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire, as well as encroaching upon the edge of Staffordshire, the north-east corner of

Cumbria and western flank of County Durham, before sinking down to the north to merge ultimately with the lowlands of Scotland (Wood and Brown, 2011).

Using a distinctive synthesis of poem, prose and documentary footage, we examine the regional landscape where manufacturing had been and still is part of the culture and the production of a new space, usually found outside or on the edge of the nearby cities, which, rather than being merely representative of life, actually transforms our experience of what really exists. In doing so, we are not interested in an empirical or conceptual foreclosure of the interstice between the flows of free solo rock climbing and the organisation of contemporary and historical life and work but rather to pose the problem of how film based art and analysis might help qualitative research take flight along a creative line of escape that disturbs the perceptual habits and expectations of more naturalistic, scientifically driven research approaches. Audiences do not just watch images, we argue, rather they compare and interpret them in terms of the affects they can have. Rock climbing is therefore used as more than a conduit for personal freedom. We see it as a way of conveying a better sense or feeling of what in Matter and Memory Bergson (1991, p. 58) calls the sensation we experience if we absorb the image of external action by a 'part or aspect of the inside of our body'. By this we mean the way film enables us 'to secure an empathic participation in the lives of others and in the situations being studied' (Barone and Eisner, 2012:, p. 12).

As writers, directors and producers of *Lines of Flight*, we closely identify with the region, having been born and brought up in the neighbouring counties of North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire, and both having learnt to climb on the small outcrops depicted in the film. The Pennine landscape holds an 'elemental sincerity' in our memories and imaginations (Bachelard, 1994). It is a space we have lived in and which therefore 'bears the essence of the notion of home' (Bachelard, 1994, p. 87). Hence, in an attempt to depict the texture of this inhabited space, everything about the scenes and scenarios we put on the screen is intended to confer a resonance that goes beyond a mere description of the geography and history that is fixed on someone who has never experienced its particular relief and time.

Likewise, free solo rock climbing was chosen because it evokes memories and places in us and because the pleasure afforded us by its sometimes extreme adventures seems to provide an escape in an otherwise predictable and risk-free world. Unlike more traditional sports that work in accordance with familiar codes of practice, free solo climbers are no longer susceptible to rules and forms imposed from outside. Their movements are unencumbered by expensive, bulky and complex equipment and of course they operate without the assurance of ropes and safety harnesses. Instead, the free soloist's body is its own equipment and the task is to insert this 'into a seamless, streaming space and to subsist in it by tapping or tracking the flows' (Kwinter, 2001, p. 31). This 'flowing' is important 'for when it stops the flow is interrupted and this interruption is injurious to the well-being of the mind' (Foley, 2010, p. 152) and also, possibly, to the body! So, when we relive dynamically a climb, we are quite sure that the rock itself had muscles, or rather counter-muscles to our own. It is this orientation toward the on-flow of sensations and feelings and not merely mental perceptions that we attempt to communicate to others.

Clear parallels may be drawn between our attempt to 'see' the feeling of our 'intimate lives' (Bachelard, 1994) as a film-effect and the 'radical empiricism' of James (1996) and others, including Bergson and Whitehead. As James defined it, radical empiricism is a philosophy that gives primacy to relations rather than to the terms in relation. Relations, James (1996, p. 42) insists, are not only 'as "real" as anything else', they are experienced, and directly so, as things in their own right. Both the sense we bring to a situation and the conditioning that we receive from the situation in return are two parts of direct experience held together by relations. Hence we begin to see that our sense of objects in the world is not governed by a mode of extrinsic connection. The sense of 'relation' is now of a different

order. It is a dynamic unity, in which both subjective and objective elements are experienced together. It follows from this that radical empiricism amounts to a rolling of subjective and objective elements into a kind of immanent relation connecting what we can perceive with what we feel by genuinely being in the world (Bergson, 1983). Rather than an indirect representation (logic), which can reflect or determine an external object, our perception is now a direct sense-feeling (Deleuze, 1992).

In the first of his two books on cinema, Deleuze (1992) brings radical empiricism to the forefront in order to conceptualise the cinematic visual image as both directly constituting and participating in the world and simultaneously undoing our indirect phenomenological representation. An image, for Deleuze (1992), whether directly or indirectly perceived, is a definite thing, entirely sufficient to itself and subsisting exactly as it occurred. Just how an image comes to appear, however, is never completely predictable. What we perceive is always less than there is because our brain acts as a screen that filters out that which we do not need, or which no longer has any interest for us. Thus the image-world on the screen originates in the different ways our capacities and interests work together with the 'goings on' (James, 1996) of the total world around us. Bergson (1991, p. 58) would say that perception is not in the perceiver (as the traditional phenomenological model might suggest) but in the way in which we absorb the image of external action by a 'part or aspect of the inside of our body'. This is why Bergson (1991, p. 58) affirms 'there is no perception without affection'. Perception is the 'immediate sensation' or 'indivisible feeling' (Bergson, 1912; James, 1996) we experience if we identify ourselves with a character in the film. Hence, in *Lines of Flight*, we try to communicate immediate sensations and indivisible feelings that come alive for the viewer (Mullarkey, 2008).

### **We are Auteurs**

The practical application of creative arts enquiry as a sensory-based methodology is currently enjoying a resurgence of interest in the social science field. Qualitative researchers have utilised image-based research, usually recorded in photographs (Berger and Mohr, 2010; Buchanan, 2001; Warren, 2002) and film (for useful overviews, see Caldwell and Henry, 2010; Halford and Knowles, 2005; Prosser, 1998), but also other creative media and channels including songs (Linstead, 2006a), verse (Linstead, 2006b) and dance (Reid, 2007; Vincs, 2007). Creative arts enquiry enables us, in its application, to grasp how a poetic impulse or short-lived image can be used to express an inner intensity or to make a distant past resound (Bachelard, 1994). Likewise, we use our film-based method to explore the past whilst also offering striking perceptions that turn to meet the immediate experience of the present.

Our experiment with qualitative methodology in *Lines of Flight* is prefigured by many concerns of the auteur theory. The film not so much resembles its directors through autobiographical content but rather through a style impregnated with our personalities. This is true especially in terms of our concern for the relationship between control and freedom in the contemporary world and the unfolding of an image in the present moment so that it becomes the scene or situation in the thought and the body of the viewer. By the same token, the auteur theory helps us explain why we have chosen a presentational line of flight that leaks out and departs from the norm in a qualitative research situation.

In what follows, we discuss both the on screen and behind the camera making of *Lines of Flight* in terms of the three apparent elements of the auteur theory put forward by Sarris (1962) and outlined above. Before doing so it is helpful first to say what we are trying to achieve by doing this. First, by 'technical competence' we do not mean our capability to narrate or to represent a scene or situation from a past life or event. This is impossible precisely because reality moment to moment is an ever changing, evolving state of affairs. Rather, we try to give experience a fresh nuance in the presence of a spectacle that really is



lived in. Second, the ‘distinguishable personality’ of the film is as an assemblage of things that have been put together in new and unexpected ways. Its personality comprises both immaterial expression – for example the history and geography of the Pennine region – and material or bodily moments of experience. Third, by ‘interior meaning’ we are concerned to move away from customary or ‘official languages’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) used in the social science research world around us. These, we argue, following Willmott (2011) and others (see, for example, Westwood and Clegg, 2003), increasingly oblige authors to ‘shoehorn’ their work into a style favoured and thus legitimated by key scholarly journals and from which ‘heterodox’ work, such as creative arts enquiry, either ‘struggles to find its way into published form’ (Westwood and Clegg, 2003, p. 14), or is ‘delegitimised’ and excluded completely.

### ***Technical Competence***

The design elements or the visual devices we have selected and arranged so as to communicate ideas and engage an active response in the viewer are undeniably important. These cinematic techniques establish the form and substance of the film and so serve our ultimate purpose to enlarge or differently enliven qualitative methodologies. Central to the desired effect are principles of kinetic, intensive, affective and rhythmic movement and the sensations of sight and feel. Through them we attempt to create a tension, or at least instability, in the sense of a situation on the screen. This strategy is established early, for example, when we use a montage of close up and distance shots, topographical writing and musical score, narration and music, to put in relation a waterfall flowing from a linear precipice, a huge early industrial garment factory and a conspicuous promontory of rocks high above. Viewers might attach thoughts of beauty and delicacy to the rolling waterfall, while the factory is suggestive of weight and seems desperately imprisoning. Meanwhile, we use the distance shot toward the outlying rocks to evoke a different context and life-world for unseen labourers. Our sequencing of shots and use of narration and music means the viewer is able to go beyond reality and to wonder about imaginary or actual lines of flight elsewhere.

Such a qualitative feeling must be ‘read’ or interpreted by the viewer, however, to make it convincing. Hence in the film we strive for immersion rather than mere appraisal or contemplation on the viewer’s part (Battista, 2009) and the more we accomplish this effect, the more we succeed in the self-reflexive perception like that described by Bergson and Deleuze. This Bergsonian sense of connection and interpretation also informs our attempts to embody an intuitive grasp of the affective quality of free solo rock climbing. Despite this purpose, previous research has noted how ‘climbing ... has so far proved generally unattractive to mainstream television or mass audiences’ (Heywood, 2006, p. 457). This, according to Heywood (2006), is because ‘it is difficult to apply to climbing a key idea like “mimesis”’. For him, ‘the core experience of climbing is to do with a real relationship with the material world and gravity, not an imaginary or symbolic one’ (Heywood, 2006, p. 457). As Kwinter (2001) points out: ‘Unlike more traditional (hunter-warrior model) sports’ (p. 29), in which the task is ‘to “master” in the macho, form-imposing sense’ (p. 31), Free-soloist climbers ‘do not conceive of themselves as exclusive or “prime motors” at the origin of their movements; they rather track from within the flows, a variety of emerging features, singularities, and unfoldings with which they can meld’ (p. 29).

In order to develop this emotion and bring it to life in the eye of the viewer, we combine images and sounds to signal the greater or less imminence of a danger and to trigger a kind of tension and suspense for the purpose of promoting sensation, as an internal state which ‘lures’ the viewer into the film’s ‘text’ (Barone, 2003). This is accomplished, for instance, in a scene toward the end of the film where we see and hear the climber ascending an imposing thin fissure in an otherwise slick and featureless rock face. His movements are

purposeful but clearly tense and his rate and depth of breathing both increase as he climbs higher, his muscles and nerves straining against ‘the downward gradient of gravity’ (Kwinter, 2001, p. 29). His fingers, inserted from tips to third knuckle and ‘locked’ (twisted) to provide momentary anchor, shoulders, pelvis and thighs, become ‘hypersensitive tamers and channelers of the gravitational sink ... that could mean the difference between triumph and disaster’ in a situation ‘brimming over with interweaving forces and flows’ (Kwinter, 2001, pp. 31). An affect connoted most notably in the erratically strewn disused quarry floor beneath, whose presence reveals the likely corporeality of the smallest mistake and is therefore a site of possible sensation for the viewer.

By selectively cutting and framing the climber’s space and concentrating the sound of his breath, although other ambient noise – other people and passing traffic – also drifts in, our intention is to bring the perceptual stimulus to its greatest intensity and so fuse the viewer’s vision with the bodily qualities of the movement on screen. We invite the viewer to experience the climber’s sensations and bodily feelings ‘as in dialogue with their own, as a shared existence, and therefore one about which we care deeply’ (Barone, 2003, p. 212). In this way, the viewer can invest the setting with meaning and can, to a greater or lesser extent, ‘feel’ with the character on the screen (Deleuze, 1992). Hence the more the danger becomes urgent, the more the viewer finds themselves in a relationship with the climber’s body and the more they actually become interested in the consequences in the scene: ‘wanting’ him to be successful, or ‘caring’ that he should not fall to the quarry floor beneath. In other words, as Flynn (1971, p. 761) writes, what we try to achieve in the scene is a high enough level of ‘subjectivity implicit in such an emotional effect’, even when the viewer knows the ending.

In practical terms we invite the viewer to ‘take in’ the particular instances or matters of fact on the screen with the same quality of conceptual feeling they have about their own first-hand experiences; a relational image, which whilst not personal, leads the viewer toward ‘recognitions that arise in a heightened intellectual/emotional state of correspondence’ (Kraus, 2011, p. 111, original emphasis). One does not need to be a free soloist or even a rock climber, or indeed a participant in any one of the interesting proliferation of lifestyle sports that nowadays display the same fluid ‘streaming’ (Kwinter, 2001), to be intoxicated by on-screen depictions of climbing as a ‘release’ or a ‘fantastic’, ‘almost an aesthetic’, or ‘meditative’ feeling or ‘way out’ of ‘the normal run of things’. Here the viewer need only identify as someone who suffers the perennial psychological, social or somatic distress of bearing with a 40 hours a week job that has been drained of its content or otherwise requires them to complete their work tasks energetically, or to display a cheerful expression during service transactions, to be able to recognise themselves. The correspondence is clear. These on-screen depictions ring true in the degree to which, as Bachelard (1994, p. 90) says, they move ‘the very depths of our being’. This is the aspect of conceptual feeling we see communicated most clearly in the film.

### ***Distinguishable Personality***

Because neither of the current authors has any formal education in film studies and both of us are novice directors, it is not possible to stamp *Lines of Flight* with consistent ‘signature’ visual devices and ‘trademark’ techniques and themes. There simply is not a sufficient oeuvre that progresses from one film to the next. Accordingly we do not challenge classic cinema in the Deleuzian sense (1992). We limit ourselves to making use of shots, cuts and montage, oriented by habit and expectation. Nonetheless, we have given the film a distinguishable personality, one that actually moves away from any notion of a self-centred filmmaker and which could be used as a broadening of the scope of creative arts practice for qualitative research.

Despite auteur theorists implying an independent maker or artist behind a film, our approach can be looked at from the point of view of an 'assemblage' that brings together a number of separate parts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Filmmaking appears to prefigure assemblage in that it breaks the material supplied down into a series of individual shots: close-up, distance, montage, and so forth, which the filmmaker then assembles into a performance for the screen (Benjamin, 2008). The significance of the assemblage for the current discussion, however, is that the filmmaker stops being an 'author' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987) and a film is no longer treated as the product of the filmmaker as a self-expressive, individual subject.

The assemblage as it appears in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work is organised in four directions, or along two planes each with two poles. On the vertical plane we have what we might call the territorial pole. This is the pole of the assemblage oriented toward stratification, or the structuring principle of organisation: for example, the longitude and latitude on a map or the metric gridding of an urban central business district (CBD). The other pole is oriented toward movement and change, or what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call de-stratified or de-territorialised space. This is a perfectly 'smooth' space characteristic of the sea, the steppe and the desert, for example, or an 'intensive' feeling, mood or texture, and so forth. These two states of space are distinguishable in principle but in fact exist only in a mixture, the complex interdependence between forces of departure and forces of capture.

On the horizontal axis, or the plane of consistency, an assemblage requires as a necessary prior condition a state of affairs or surrounding general activity in the background. The industrial factory portrayed early in the film, for example, seems to quantify the social and political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the region: crises affecting early systems of manufacture; subsequent changes in labour relations and working conditions; rise of the capitalist rationalisation of work as production (Thompson, 1966). At the same time, this prior background activity remains 'abstract' and 'entirely undetermined' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) as long as we do not relate it to more concrete actualities in the present moment. On the opposite pole, our knowledge of the abstract assemblage presupposes a certain 'machinic assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) that qualifies how the disparate material, cognitive, physical and social components in an abstraction interrelate and how they affect and are affected by one another. What this means is that a machinic assemblage, as we understand it, is simultaneously both an intermediary and a stopper for the intermingling of very different kinds of social and technical bodies and parts that concretise at a given moment, but which can be effectuated differently under a changed state of affairs. Given that a machinic assemblage is at the core of our approach, we need to understand how this dynamic unity of people and objects bears on the personality of the film.

We can start by saying that everything we did can be understood as taking place in a complex assemblage of bodies, technologies and passions reacting to each other. For instance, although one of us had the initial inspiration for the film's concept and the other brought their past experience of the necessary design considerations and organisation that go into filmmaking, 'what was important for us was less our working together than this strange fact of working between the two of us' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 17). As Deleuze points out, this work 'between the two' is an assemblage of parts. Nonetheless, the assemblage is not only the set of our self-expressive acts it is also understood in terms of a grouping together of human and technological components. Our expressive acts are not independent of a set of material connections, including storyboards incorporating photography, poetry, cuttings and notes. The coexistence of people, parts, original situations and machines, including viewers, in the film, implies a machinic assemblage. To underline this last point, we may note that the film essentially left post-production as an incomplete object, which sought a further connection with its viewer, yet another stage caught up in the assemblage.

One disadvantage of saying that everything is an assemblage, as only involving supposedly non or trans-human circuits, is that we render the human component 'indiscernible' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In order 'to retain a certain minimal humanism' and 'sense of personal authorship' (Thrift, 2008, p. 13) we wish to look at a crucial, albeit technicised human component in our assemblage, the cinematographer.

Key among the cinematographer's many contributions to shaping the overall personality of the film was his attention to lighting, focus and composition, camera placement and the treatment of space: close-up, long-shot, montage, and so forth. Whilst each of these visual devices is important in its own right, it was his critical 'third voice' that provided a crucial component in the assemblage. Rather than passively employing various technical resources to put a glossy finish to a carefully constructed script, his voice actually tempered our own individual traits of expression. The inclusion of his expressive qualities, we argue, does not impose a heroic version of auteurism, which emphasises filmmakers themselves. This is because there is no way in the final analysis to talk about the specific character of the human component without incorporating an analysis of the surrounding context. He is seen less as an originating subject capable of 'imposing properties' or 'constituting effects' upon a homogeneous field (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 408) and more as a 'craftsman' (Thrift, 2008), or 'artisan' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), simply following a flow or joining what goes on between the parts of a greater machinic process.

The personality given to the film has no static point of reference but is rather oriented toward processes of assemblage that never settle in one place. These processes consist of connecting and reconnecting different forms, substances, contents and expressions, to locate, capture and still aspects and parts that continually make and unmake each other. To repeat Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) earlier insight, although only two of us wrote, directed and produced *Lines of Flight*, the way in which the work is assembled between us means that it does not have a simple personality or clear identity. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, p. 257; 259) vision, the film is only defined by 'what it can do'; 'it is affect in itself'.

### ***Interior Meaning***

By making *Lines of Flight* we wanted to evaluate the degrees of coding, decoding and recoding of scientific social research, which offers itself as a sort of 'official' or 'major' language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 16) in the field of scholarly publication. The essential point about codes is that they constrain and bound socio-political flows by instituting qualitative hierarchies: good and bad, legitimate and illegitimate or striated and smooth. One response is to pursue ways of communicating that exceed, break with and are disconnected from these official codes. Clearly, this is not the world we live in, a world of free form flows, anti-connection and so forth. Forms of absolute decoding seem at best only half true and at worst highly romanticised. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983) point out, we cannot flee the codes of social situations completely, we would simply dissolve: fleeing from codes has limits and tends toward re-coding. At the same time, official codes and fixed orders of things are not really fixed but rather they 'leak' and have to be constantly tended to in order to be preserved. This produces a further possible response and one that we have adopted in the current investigation.

Given the interplay between coding, decoding and recoding, what interested us was to find productive connections that might engage with and challenge the dominant parameters of qualitative research: the rules sustained and perpetuated by certain 'citadels of publishing power' (Westwood and Clegg, 2003, p. 14), which many researchers imbibe as they practice. Hence we wanted to use creative arts enquiry to give rise to what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) refer to as a 'minor' or 'marginal' language. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call this 'side communication', composed of supplements and surplus values; tiny lines of flight that

have been overlooked in the order of some – certainly not all: see, for example, Parker and Thomas, 2011 – key scholarly journal publications.

Throughout the project, we were simultaneously encouraged to have confidence in our film as a stand alone artwork rather than something forced to serve a written account. At the same time, pressure was inevitably placed upon us to publish a conventional high quality written text, something we did with ‘exceptional reluctance’ (Burrell, 1993). This sharp delineation between on the one hand ‘serious’ articles and on the other apparently ‘frivolous’ arts-based outputs (Taylor and Saarenen, 1994, quoted in Westwood and Clegg, 2003, p. 14), perhaps illustrates the extent to which the social sciences remain inattentive to the potential impact of the creative arts as research in-itself. We are writing with an awareness of extant studies provoking us to think in response to what film enables us to experience (see, for example, Caldwell and Henry, 2010; Goodman, 2004; Halford and Knowles, 2005), but these are only a few attempts to put into practice aesthetic engagement without, however, reducing film to a mere reflection of embedded theory or as a supplementary material to the typical written thesis (Sinnerbrink, 2011; Smith, 2009).

Despite this modest interest in artistic forms of output, it is the official language of science that remains deeply entrenched in the minds and professional practices of many qualitative researchers and the editors of key scholarly journals (Bryman, 2011; Grey, 2010; Parker and Thomas, 2011; Suddaby et al., 2011; Westwood and Clegg, 2003). As a consequence, working methods and processes invented for naturalistic purposes inevitably constitute something of a ‘black hole’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987) for many qualitative researchers looking to publish their work, with everything sucked in toward it, even when the literature has shown these methods fail to capture the complexity of meaningful experiences and feelings attached by human actors to their activities (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002).

A perceived problem of pulling the creative arts into qualitative research concerns the supposed lack of rigour in the former (Thrift, 2007). By stressing sensation and affectivity, however, Thrift (2007, p. 12) believes not only ‘that the performing arts can have as much rigour as any other experimental set up’ but also that they ‘may help us to inject a note of wonder back into a social science which, too often, assumes it must explain everything’. To this end, our experience of making *Lines of Flight* offers a clear demonstration that a method which can be used to excite people and capture their attention (Goodman, 2004) not only operates as a valid mode of aesthetic enquiry and knowledge production but can also perform an important anti-function to critique some of the assumptions that underpin more common approaches to qualitative research.

As a type of knowledge production and as a dissemination strategy, creative arts enquiry invites thinking across epistemologies and has broad interdisciplinary applications (Jones, 2006). It also presents two immediate challenges. The first of these challenges relates to the actual conduct of creative arts enquiry. One danger is that we narrow our concepts and simply make creative art practices fit prevailing (instrumental) imagery about aesthetic experience: what can artistic or aesthetic forms do for us (Taylor and Hansen, 2005)? More ironically perhaps, Jones (2006, p. 71) points out a subsidiary danger that as qualitative researchers we may reach beyond our own grasp and capabilities: ‘too many of us have sat through embarrassing dramatisations comprised of well-meaning social scientists’ attempts at becoming actors’.

The second immediate challenge is focused on the evaluation of such ‘scholarly’ work when it no longer fits and actually creates the opposite effect from the official, referential genre. As the fact of the current discussion testifies, it is difficult to try to do something that is not supported by a written text. Nonetheless, our use of an alternative ‘non-representational’ style of work ‘offers an engaged account of the world’ (Thrift, 2007, p. 112)

based upon valuing creative arts enquiry in its own right, and is motivated by a heterogeneous series of inspirations. These include exploring the gap between sensation, perception and subjective action in the field and wrestling with questions about what counts as 'rigor', 'validity' and 'reliability' in the language of qualitative research.

As a final note, we suggest these questions are common to arts based and scientific approaches. It is hoped that further work will lead to small improvements in the ways in which the creative arts are viewed and thus the impetus to create new possibilities within qualitative research fields. If this is the case, we ask that the role of the styles and genre of video, visual images and film, as well as print media, feature in the discussion about publication as 'sensuous scholarship' (Thrift, 2007, p. 148; see also Barone, 2003; Mullen, 2003; Slattery, 2003), or as a source of 'more dramatic, more intense and more dynamic representations' (Hassard and Holliday, 1998, p. 1). There is an amazing potential.

## Conclusion

The auteur theory has been both inspiration and instrument for our current investigation of qualitative methodology. We have drawn on this self-expressive theory and on our practical experience of crafting a documentary film *Lines of Flight* to think about the ways in which it is possible for creative arts enquiries to work through, not against, a set of regulative codes imposed on them by a scientific research world. We have shown how the creative arts practice of filmmaking can make a contribution to our understanding of sensory or affective knowledge in qualitative research. We realise there will be trade-offs among reliability or consistency by using such practices compared with more common qualitative approaches, but we also argue the degree of difference should not be over played.

Filmmaking as creative arts enquiry, like many qualitative research approaches, does not try to represent reality in a neutral state and what we have in mind is much more than straightforward visual documentation. Our use of film is not meant to simply imitate or illustrate the written scholarly record but rather to recover the vitality of our immediate experience in the Bergsonian sense. The contribution of film itself as a mode of thinking lies precisely in the extent that it can be used to evoke, elicit and engage viewers in affective dynamisms that comprise physical phenomena and our sensuous perceptions. Sensation is only realised in the present moment when the image becomes the lived time of our thoughts and bodies (Deleuze, 1990). Trying to capture the process of sensation, however, is like trying to seize the present, which once you grab it is gone.

At a more conceptual level, by adopting a position of presence or touch (Thrift, 2007), we have added empirical support to the claim that creative arts practices deserve greater recognition in future qualitative research projects. Nonetheless, if the creative arts are to be used to challenge scientific approaches, we must first engage with the existing boundaries and rules of research design. We are reminded here of Burrell's (1993) attempt to have a compilation of pieces of video-tape instead of an article stand as a meaningful output. This requires a culture where risk is permissible and in which leading funding bodies, editors of key scholarly journals and researchers alike are sufficiently alert to recognise engagement with modes of creative arts enquiry to be as serious and as rigorous as a refereed journal article.

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## Notes

Winner of the 2010 Jury Prize at the *UNNIM Mountain Film Festival* and Best Film on Mountain Culture at the *Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival*; nominated for Best International Short Film at the *Reel Earth Environmental Film Festival* and finalist for Best Film on Mountain Culture at the *Banff Mountain Film Festival*.

The short documentary film *Lines of Flight*, which the content of this article supports, is available to view at: <https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/bus/LinesofFlight/index.html>